President Chooses Kelley As the 'Best' to Head FBI

By Lou Cannon
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Nixon yesterday named Clarence Marion Kelley, a 61-year-old police chief and former FBI agent, as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and proclaimed him "the best man in the country" for the job.

Kelley, known as a tough administrator, has been police chief in Kansas City, Mo., for the past 12 years and was an FBI agent for two decades before that. He said he would combat crime without violating "human rights and dignity" and he praised the role of the press in opposing "oppressive law enforcement."

The announcement, a poorly kept administration secret for the past two days, came on a day when the President met with his cabinet and pledged to move ahead despite problems caused by the Watergate scandal.

Mr. Nixon told the Cabinet that the administration was "alive and working" and that the government's success in dealing with foreign and domestic issues would have more long-range impact on the country and his administration than Watergate.

He made his comment in response to remarks by Secretary of Labor Peter J. Brennan, who said that Watergate was more of an issue in Washington than in the country as a whole.

The Cabinet meeting was the first ever attended by Republican congressional leaders. Both Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (Penn.) and House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford (Mich.) spoke briefly to the Cabinet. They are scheduled to attend all Cabinet meetings as part of the new White House policy of improving executive department access for congressional leaders.

Ford said afterward that the new policy assured him of an opportunity to discuss issues with Cabinet leaders face-to-face and also gave Republican congressmen the feeling that they have "a direct conduit" to the President.

The Cabinet applauded the President when he told them of "sacrifices" that Gen. Alexander Haig was making in giving up his position as Army vice chief of staff to become the chief White House administrative officer. Cabinet members also applauded newly named domestic affairs adviser Melvin R. Laird after he pledged a new era of cooperation between the administration and Congress.

Laird and Haig were named to the top two White House jobs Wednesday as the White House reshuffle continued in the wake of Watergate.

But the White House denied yesterday that prospective changes in the administration include the departure of John Connally, the former Treasury Secretary who is now a part-time adviser to the President. The Washington Post reported in its late editions Thursday that Connally was unhappy at the lack of a definite assignment and had told friends he was ready to quit.

Deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said that Connally had told him he was not quitting. At the same time Warren said that Connally "would not stay forever" and that he had not been given any specific assignment.

No specific role was envisioned for Connally when he joined the administration less than a month ago, Warren said.

The White House also denied a report published by Business Week magazine that Treasury Secretary George P. Shultz was unhappy and may also resign.

In naming Kelley as acting director of the FBI the White House appeared anxious to avoid the political controversy that surrounded the previous appointment of L. Patrick Gray III.

Gray served as acting director for 11 months but was forced to resign during his confirmation hearing after prolonged criticism of his handling of the Watergate case and his partisan role in the 1972 election campaign.

The White House refused even to disclose Kelley's party affiliation and Warren, when asked about it, said: "If he wants to tell you, he will."

In a photo session before the announcement of the appointment, a reporter asked Kelley his party affiliation.

President Nixon put his hand in front of the nominee and said:

"We haven't even asked him whether he is a Democrat or a Republican—don't tell them."

Later, the President added jokingly that Kelley should tell his affiliation "only if he is a registered Democrat."

The FBI has not had a permanent director since J. Edgar Hoover died more than a year ago, but the White House is optimistic that Kelley will win speedy confirmation from the Senate.

Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson, who appeared with Kelley, said that the Kansas City police chief was chosen from a final list of 27 possibilities and was "the best possible man we could find."

William D. Ruckelshaus will continue as acting director of the FBI until Kelley is confirmed, Richardson said.

By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

President Nixon congratulates Clarence M. Kelley, chosen as FBI director.